

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY DRAWINGS

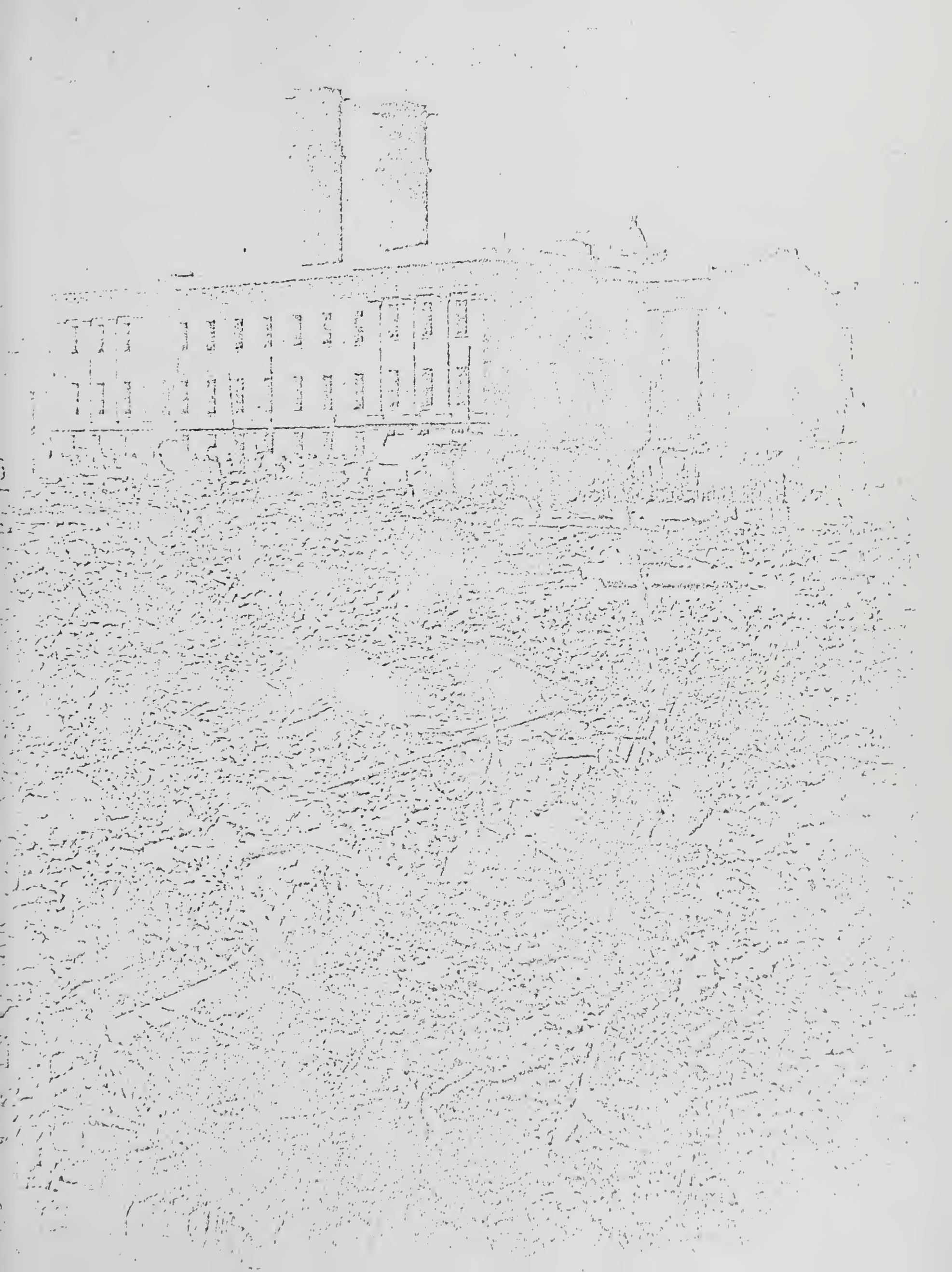
Following are measured drawings of the  
OLD SAN FRANCISCO MINT

These were made in July and August, 1962,  
under the supervision of John N. Dehaas, Jr.  
Architect A.I.A., Montana State College

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MSU  
Bozeman







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## INTRODUCTION

Declaring "that the spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic past," and realizing that the preservation of these tangible reminders of the past should be encouraged by the Federal Government, the 89th Congress, on October 15, 1966, passed Public Law 89-665, the National Historic Preservation Act.

This law authorized the Secretary of the Interior, among other things, "to expand and maintain a national register of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture," to be known as the National Register of Historic Places.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation is also a creation of Public Law 89-665. Among its several duties, the Council is required to "advise the President and Congress on matters relative to historic preservation." One particular application of this duty is identified as Section 106 of Public Law 89-665. It reads as follows:

The head of any Federal agency having direct or indirect jurisdiction over a proposed Federal or federally assisted undertaking in any State and the head of any Federal department or independent agency having authority to license any undertaking shall, prior to the approval of the expenditure of any Federal funds on the undertaking or prior to the issuance of any license, as the case may be, take into account the effect of the undertaking on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in the National Register. The head of any such Federal agency shall afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation established under title II of this Act a reasonable opportunity to comment with regard to such undertaking.





HISTORY  
1869 - 1937

In 1852, only three years after the first gold strike at Sutter's Mill, Congress authorized the establishment of a branch of the United States Mint in San Francisco, and in 1854 it went into operation. Prior to the opening of the Mint, San Francisco was the finance and supply center for all western mining operations. The resulting frenzy of business activity made the city a monetary jungle with all sorts of foreign and domestic money, including privately minted gold coins, in circulation. The gold content of these slugs ranged from 75% to over 100% of stated value. The advent of the Mint and its coinage operation quickly eliminated all other currency and brought stability to the San Francisco financial market. The Mint handled all the gold produced by the mines of California's Mother Lode, and this alleviated the necessity of shipping the bullion and gold dust to the East for coinage. When silver was discovered in Nevada, the increased flow of precious metals was too great for the existing facilities, and Congress appropriated \$300,000 for the construction of a second mint in 1864.



*Front elevation circa 1885. (Photo by Runnels and Stateler, from the collection of Bernard Mollenhauer)*



A site on the northwest corner of Fifth and Mission Streets was purchased in 1867 for \$100,000, and construction was begun in 1869. Although it was originally estimated that the structure would cost slightly more than one million dollars, the final cost was \$2,358,636. The cornerstone, laid on May 26, 1870, contained a copper casket with coins, newspapers, photographs, and other mementos of the occasion. The finished structure was not turned over to the Superintendent until November 5, 1874. After two short speeches, the selected guests present at the dedication adjourned to a second floor corridor to enjoy an "appetizing collation."

From the stamping of the first coins in 1874, the new San Francisco Mint played a significant role in the financial history of the nation. Indeed, as early as 1870, the production of this branch mint had surpassed that of the mother plant in Philadelphia. In 1873 Congress gave recognition to this fact by making the San Francisco Mint an independent unit. Further acknowledgement of the important role of the Mint in the nation's financial affairs came a year later when Congress designated it a Sub-Treasury public depository.

From the time operations began, the new Mint was the most active in the country. It reached a peak of production in 1877 when \$50,000,000 in coins were stamped. In its 22 vaults was stored a large portion of the nation's supply of coins as well as gold and silver bullion.

The most dramatic single event in the building's history was its survival of the earthquake of 1906. The entire area around the Mint was devastated by the tremors and inferno which followed, but the solidity of the Mint's construction withstood the quake. The heroic efforts of soldiers and Mint employees, who used the Mint's own water supply provided by a well in the courtyard, and a one-inch hose, kept flames away from both the front of the building and later from the back. As a result, the \$200,000,000 then in storage was saved from destruction. As the devastated city began to recover from the disaster, the Mint served as a "clearing-house bank." Local banks, destroyed by the cataclysm, validated deposits of their customers, who then withdrew funds from the Mint. The Mint's survival permitted a quick recirculation of money, and the city made a more rapid recovery than would otherwise have been possible.



Throughout the first quarter and well into the second quarter of the present century, the Mint continued to be of prime importance to the country's economic well-being. After the end of the Sub-Treasury system in the 1920's, one-third of the United States gold reserves were stored in the building. By the early 1930's, more than a million dollars worth of gold bullion per day came into the receiving room. Throughout this period the Mint not only continued to produce coins of the United States, but also on occasion minted coins for foreign powers, among them Japan and several Latin American nations which were in need of currency systems as they emerged from colonial to independent status.

In 1937 a third mint was constructed in San Francisco, and operations in the Old Mint ceased. Although the building was used by other Federal agencies after 1937, the effective history of the structure as a mint, i.e., the purpose for which it had been designed and constructed, may be said to have come to an end.

*The photographs on the following two pages show the processing rooms in the San Francisco Mint in about 1885 when the Mint was the most active in the country. (Photos by Rumrorts and Stateler, from the collection of Bernard Mollenhauer)*







*Rolling Room*



*Coining Room*

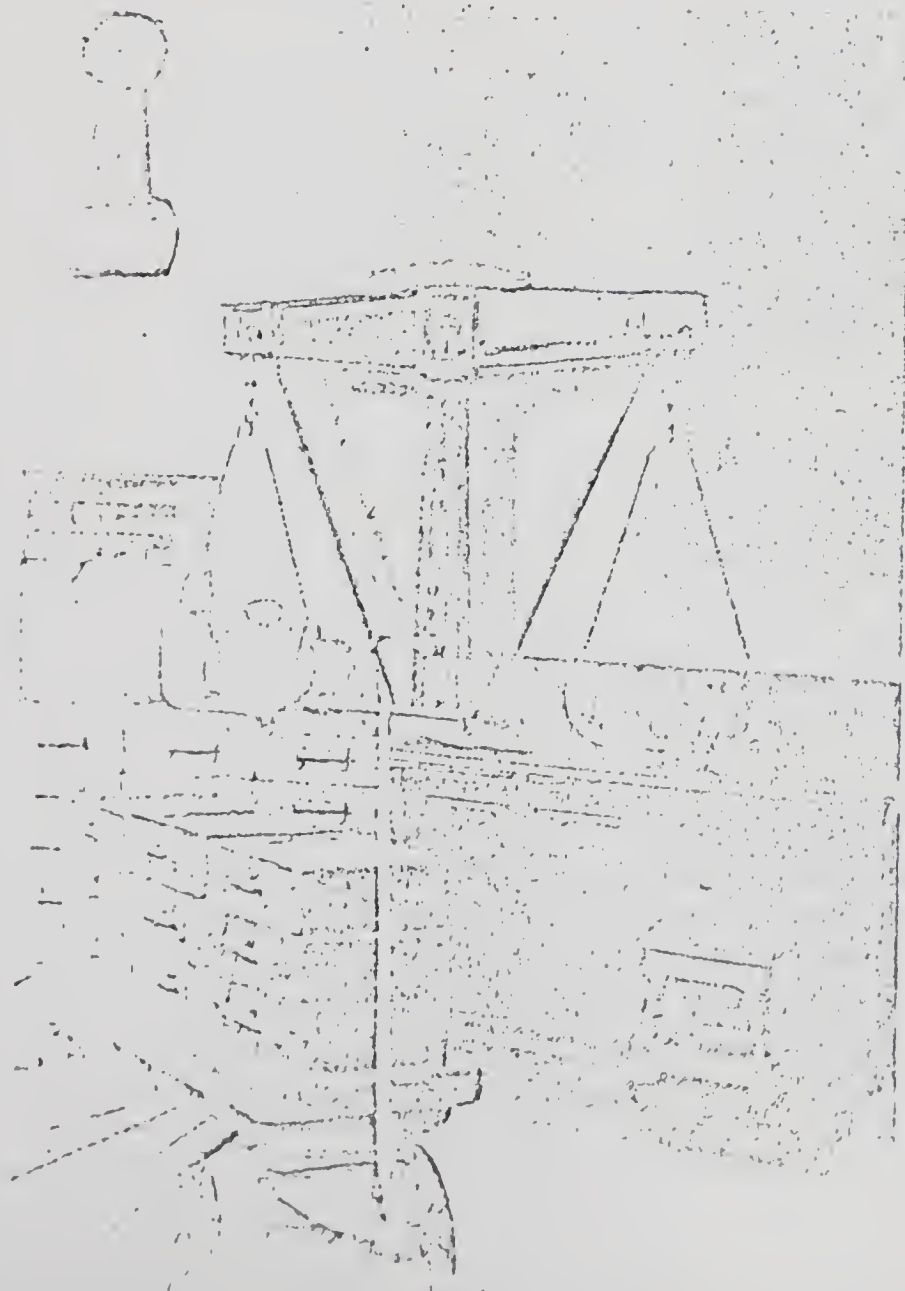






*Refinery*

*Coiner's Weighing Room*



*Refinery*





## SITE

Although the site for the second San Francisco Mint was purchased on March 7, 1867, construction was not begun until 1869. Photographs taken during the construction show that the neighborhood was then largely residential and perhaps not of the highest quality. The Mint, in fact, must have presented quite as much a contrast then as it does now. This contrast is apparent in the observation of one San Franciscan who complained soon after the building's completion that its columns "like fluted and petrified pines" contrasted "too violently with the light and uncertain architecture of a city of wood."

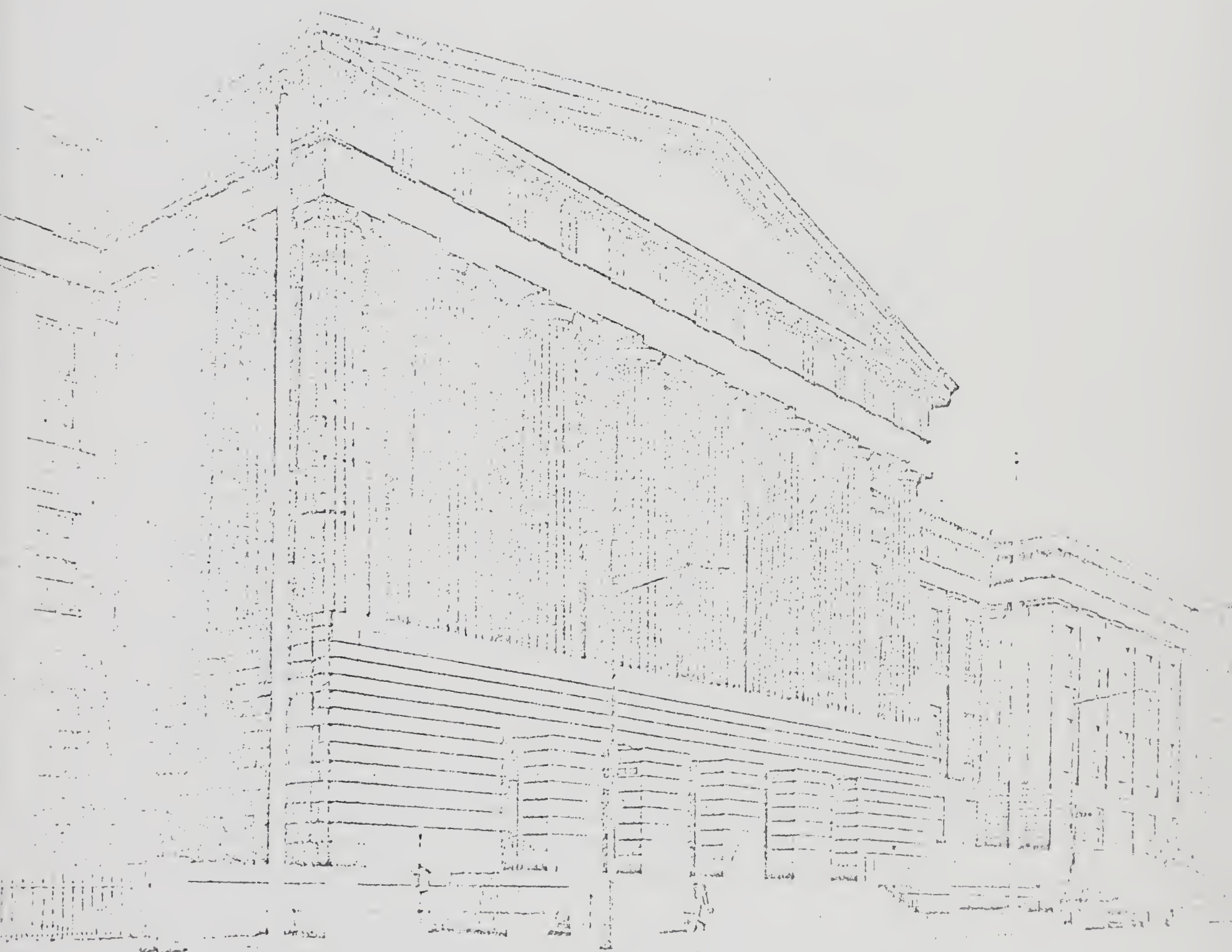
By 1906 many of the earlier two-and three-story frame houses which formerly surrounded the Mint had been replaced by larger, more substantial commercial buildings. Though most of these structures perished either in the earthquake of 1906 or the ensuing holocaust, they were soon replaced by similar buildings.

From the early 20th century to the present, this section of the city was devoted largely to commercial interests. Today the area around the Mint bears a depressed appearance. The Mint itself is surrounded by several shops, a recently erected, multi-story parking garage, and the main office and printing plant of the San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner. Within two blocks are several large department stores.

Although the immediate surroundings of the Old Mint do not in any respect compliment the structure itself, there are several impressive and important San Francisco landmarks in close proximity. The famous cable car turntable at the intersection of Market and Powell Streets is but a block away to the north while the San Francisco Civic Center lies a few blocks to the northwest.

Thus despite the seeming dichotomy of being in a generally undistinguished immediate environment, but within short range of several of San Francisco's noted landmarks, the Old Mint could easily be incorporated into plans which would not only tie it to these other focal points, but also allow it to serve as a nucleus for upgrading the immediate neighborhood.





*The Old Patent Office Building, Washington, D.C. Built 1836-1867. One of the first and finest Classic Revival public buildings in the Nation's Capital, the fire-resistant construction of this building was supervised by Robert Mills. It is in the Greek, rather than the Roman, Doric style used by Mullett in the San Francisco Mint. (Photo by Jack E. Boucher, 1968)*





## THE CLASSIC REVIVAL STYLE

The Classic Revival was by all odds the most universal and widespread style in American building from circa 1820 to the advent of the Civil War. Although classic elements had long been an integral part of American design, never before had such strict adherence to classic proportion and the actual copying of ancient buildings been practiced here.

Motivated partly by a love for and appreciation of the chasteness and orderliness implicit in classic design, American builders, and the public for whom they built, also began to rationalize their repeated copying by seeing a kinship between themselves and the Greeks and Romans. America was hailed as the direct descendent of the cultural, artistic, and moral perfection of ancient Greece. In addition modern Greece earned the sympathy and support of America in its 1821-1827 war for independence from the Turks. Parallels were drawn between this conflict and America's own earlier struggle for independence. Throughout the ever-expanding United States of this period, classic porticos, cornices, and moldings appeared on houses, churches, and public buildings in newly established towns given names such as Rome, Ionia, Athens, and Sparta. It would be incorrect, however, to assume that all Classic Revival design was merely imitative. In the hands of professionals, classic details and proportions were skillfully combined with modern plans for buildings which were to perform functions unknown to the ancients. Nor were architects ignorant of new techniques and materials which had recently become available even though they often did their best to disguise them.

The Federal government, particularly the Treasury Department, did its part to foster this development of Classic Revival architecture. The tenor of public building in the United States had, in fact, been set by the first





Architect of the Treasury, Robert Mills. His high standards of construction and classically inspired design produced monuments throughout the country which reflected an image suitable to a stable and prospering young government. Mill's example was followed by his successors, Isaiah Rogers and Ammi B. Young, the latter of whom was the first to serve as Supervising Architect of the Treasury after creation of the post in 1852.

Until the middle of the 19th century, all buildings authorized under the auspices of the Treasury Department were designed in the classic idiom. However, by the 1860's, a change became discernible. The rapid industrial and technological expansion following the Civil War produced new building techniques as well as a new affluence which found expression in more ostentatious architectural forms than the restrained and dignified classical temple. Reflecting these changes, a new style borrowed from the France of Louis Napoleon, and thus termed Second French Empire, gained rapidly in popularity in the 1860's. It was so closely associated with public building during the Grant administration that it became known as the "General Grant Style."

The work of Alfred Burt Mullett, the architect of the Old San Francisco Mint, may be seen as a link between these two styles. Although a pupil and protege of Rogers, he had previously designed structures in the Second French Empire style and was soon to make plans for the State, War, and Navy Building in Washington, D.C. Yet he designed the San Francisco Mint in the familiar, established Classic Revival style.

Several suggestions may be made for Mullett's choice of design. The idea that a bank, or any building associated with the storage and especially the actual making of coins, should reflect a sense of security and solidity has ever been a strong design criteria in such structures. Further the building was designed after the earthquake of 1868 which had destroyed much of San Francisco, and this may also account for the choice of a style which by its very nature has little superfluous ornamentation. Correspondence between those in charge of the Mint's construction indicates that resistance to further shocks was a prime consideration in the planning.



Mullett and his contemporaries could not have realized at that time that the Old Mint would become the last great American building to be designed and erected in the Classic Revival style. This, and the knowledge that it is the only monumental building of its type on the West coast, combine to accentuate its significance.

The grand scale envisioned for the building may be seen in a brief reference to its dimensions and a comparison of its measurements with those of several other well-known buildings. The Mint measures 220 feet long and 165 feet wide, considering basically its general rectangular shape and not the varied projections of portico and pavilions. The net usable floor space of the two main floors and basement has been estimated at 51,000 square feet. On its completion, the gross floor area was given as 73,221 square feet.



*The Pension Building, Washington, D. C., built in 1882-1886 from designs by General Montgomery C. Meigs. Trained as an engineer, Meigs here demonstrated familiarity with classic design elements. (Photo by Jack E. Boucher, 1968)*



The earliest monumental Classic Revival building in the United States, the Virginia State Capitol at Richmond, was erected in 1785-1798 from plans by Thomas Jefferson. Prior to its early twentieth century additions, the temple form structure measured approximately 146 feet by 84 feet.

One of the most dignified and impressive of the nation's public buildings is the Old Patent Office in Washington, D. C. Designed in part by Robert Mills, and under construction from 1840-1867, this building measures 405 feet by 275 feet, and contains a net usable floor space of 237,276 square feet.



10. Former State, War, and Navy Building in Washington, D.C. Built 1861-1870, Millard's most important work in the Second French Empire style, this building is the nation's largest. (Photo by Donald B. Smith, 1960)





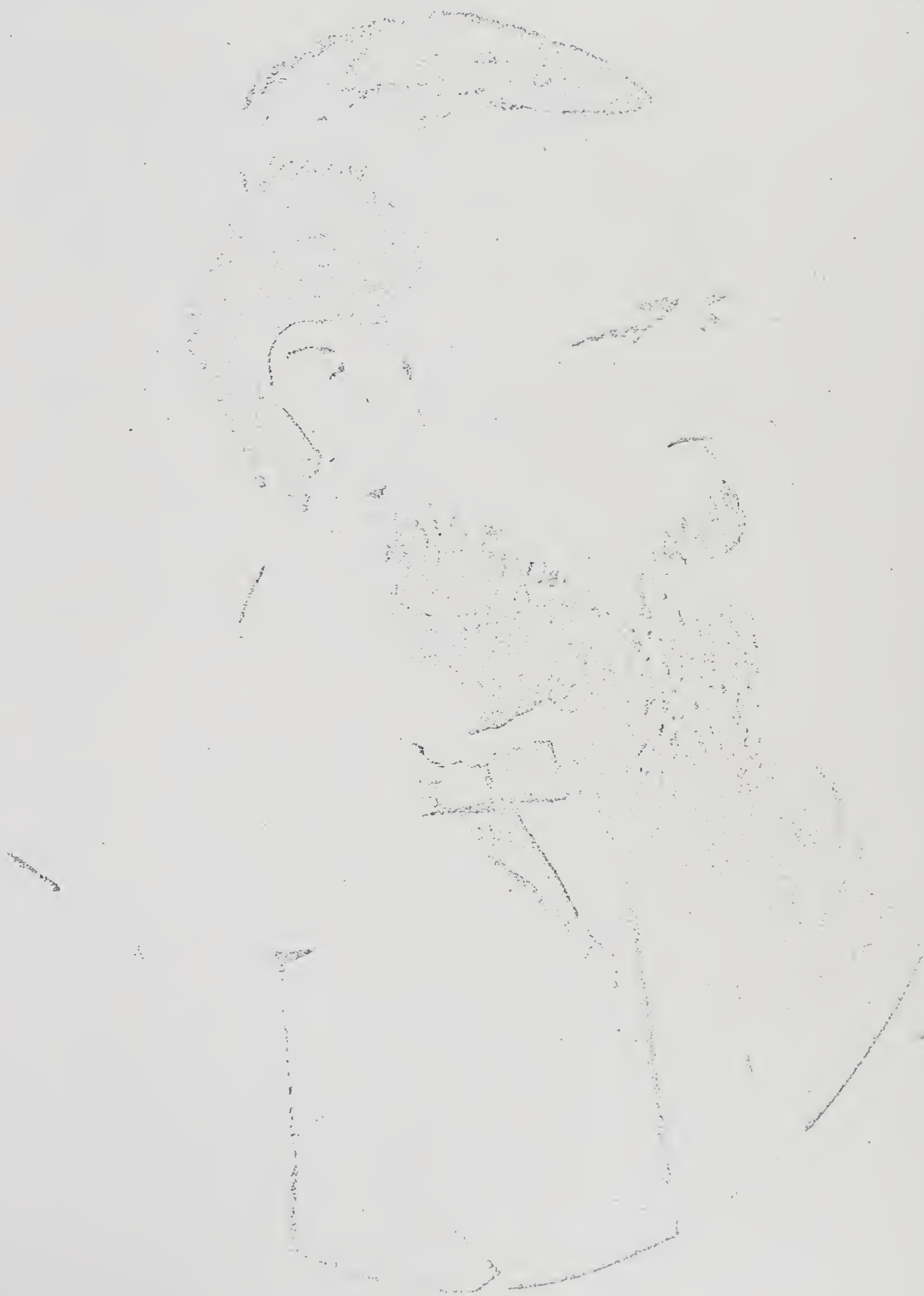
Mullet's State, War, and Navy Building, now the Executive Office Building, has alternately been condemned as an example of "American ironic" and praised as "The Master-work of the Gilded Age." Built from 1871-1888, it is approximately 520 feet by 285 feet.

Contemporary with the State, War, and Navy Building is Washington, D. C.'s economy version of Rome's Farnese Palace. This, the Pension Building, was erected in 1882-1886, under the auspices of the Department of the Interior. This edifice measures 400 feet by 200 feet and has a gross floor area of 156,000 square feet on its four floors.

In comparing the mint to its Federal contemporaries in Washington, it should be remembered that the District of Columbia buildings were envisioned to house functions on a national scale, i.e., there was no other national Pension Building in the country, but there were several mints. The State, War, and Navy Building, the largest of the structures mentioned, was built to house three departments of the Federal government. In this light, the scale and size of the Old San Francisco mint may be seen as truly monumental.









The Old San Francisco Mint was declared eligible for designation as a National Historic Landmark on July 3, 1961. Although the General Services Administration, until recently the administering agency for the structure, has never applied for the designation of the Old Mint as a National Historic Landmark, the fact that it has been declared eligible has caused it to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places, affording it the measure of protection provided under Public Law 89-665.

The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, at present the administering agency responsible for the Mint, proposes to transfer the property to the State of California for use by San Francisco State College. It is understood that the college would demolish the Old Mint and erect a modern building on the site to serve as a "downtown campus." This proposal would naturally have an adverse effect on the Old Mint. Therefore, this report has been prepared for the consideration of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation when it offers its comments on August 6-7, 1969.



## THE ARCHITECT - ALFRED B. MULLETT

Alfred Bult Mullett (1834-1890) served as Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department from 1866 until 1874. His tenure of office coincided with an accelerated government building program following the Civil War, and Mullett was responsible for the design of many public buildings in cities and towns throughout the country. The buildings erected by the Treasury Department while Mullett held the office of Supervising Architect are unexcelled by any American structures of their time in scale and solidity of construction.

Mullett was born in Taunton, England on April 7, 1834. In 1843 his family emigrated to the United States, settling in Glendale, Ohio, a suburb of Cincinnati. Mullett received his academic training in Ohio and Europe, and in 1860 was employed in the office of the noted Greek Revival architect, Isaiah Rogers, who had moved to Cincinnati in 1848. Rogers became Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department in 1862 and brought Mullett to Washington as a member of his staff. Mullett's rise in rank was rapid, and in 1866 Secretary of the Treasury Hugh McCulloch appointed him to the post of Supervising Architect.

Mullett inherited the classical tradition of Federal building from his predecessor and mentor, Rogers. In Washington he completed Robert Mill's Treasury Building by adding a north wing, adhering closely to the style in which Ammi B. Young and Rogers had built the south and west wings. Mullett's Post Office and Courthouse in Portland, Maine and his Custom House in Portland, Oregon also reflect the style which had become so identified with government buildings of the young nation.

The Old San Francisco Mint has been adjudged Mullett's most important work in the Classic Revival style. In fineness of detail and quality of construction, it carried on the principles which had influenced public building for over 50 years. As the last major example of Classic Revival architecture, the Mint signaled the end of an era in American monumental architecture.





*U.S. Court House and Post Office in Portland, Maine. Built 1867-1873. One of the numerous smaller government buildings designed by Mullett and a fine example of his work in the Classic Revival style, this structure was demolished in 1965. (Photocopy of 1868 perspective by Von Koerber.)*

Mullett also worked in the more elaborate and decorative style of the Second French Empire. As Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, he was responsible for many Federal buildings executed in this lavish style including post offices in New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, and St. Louis and buildings elsewhere including assay offices, custom houses, and hospitals.

The former State, War, and Navy Building was the grandest edifice erected in Washington, D.C. in the Second French Empire style and was rivalled elsewhere in the nation only by John McArthur, Jr.'s Philadelphia City Hall. The State, War, and Navy, now the Executive Office Building, was the capstone of Mullett's career. However, personal conflicts during the building's long period of construction eventually led to Mullett's resignation and the end of his career of public service. He continued in private

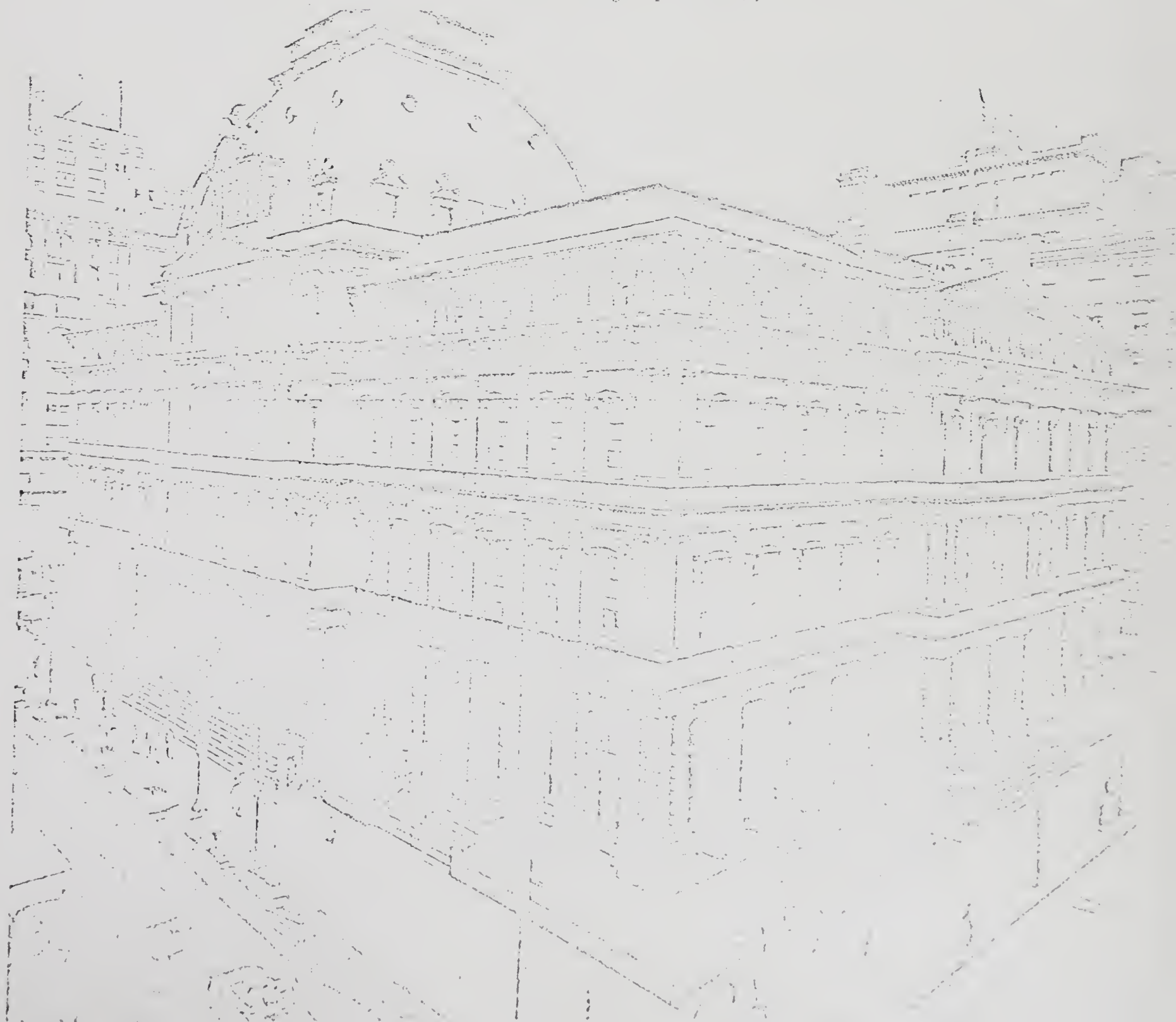




architectural practice in Washington, D.C. until October 20, 1890, when he took his life in a fit of despondency over the failure to receive compensation claimed for his work, done many years earlier, on the State, War, and Navy Building.

As an architect, Alfred Burt Mullett was a major figure of his day. His two masterpieces were the San Francisco Mint, the last monumental American Classic Revival structure, and the State, War, and Navy Building, one of the two greatest Neo-French Renaissance buildings in the United States.

*U. S. Court House, Custom House, and Post Office, St. Louis, Missouri. Built 1872-1884. Of the five major Federal Court House and Custom House buildings designed by Mullett in the 1870's, this is the only one still standing. It is a fine example of what has come to be known as the "General Grant Style." (Photo by Paul Piaget, 1965.)*







FRONT-ELEVATION

*Original working drawing of the front elevation of the Mint. (National Archives)*



*The Roman Doric hexastyle portico with granite steps and monolithic sandstone columns is the Mint's most important single design feature. Note the decaying condition of the cornice. (Photo by William S. Rieco, 1968)*



## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

### Exterior

The structure, which occupies the greater part of a city block, is basically a rectangle, 220 feet long and 165 feet wide. The projections of the portico, the central portion of the rear facade, and the pavilions at each of the four corners, however, tend to de-emphasize this simple geometric form. Originally there was an interior court penetrating all three stories of the building. This was roofed over at the first floor level prior to 1914 to house a new engine room and sweeper's room. Still later, in 1928, a two-story vault was added in this space.

The building is two full stories in height and rests upon a 12 foot high podium or basement. Although several doors were provided in the basement to allow ore carts to enter the vaults, there is only one exterior access to the main floor. The two main floors are each approximately 18 feet high.

The architectural refinements of the exterior are subtly augmented by the use of contrasting materials. The podium, which in the classic vocabulary is not intended to read as a part of the building itself, is faced with California Rocklin granite, while the remainder of the exterior is faced with blue-gray mottled sandstone from British Columbia. The six columns of the portico are sandstone monoliths.

The main or Fifth Street facade is centered with a finely designed and executed Roman Doric hexastyle portico. This portico shelters the building's main entrance which is approached by a monumental flight of granite steps, partially enclosed by projecting podium walls. Although the portico is but one of five parts of this elevation, its central position, projection, and well-executed detail accentuate it visually as the building's most important single design feature.





On either side of the portico are four-bay, recessed hyphens which serve as connecting links between the central element and the corner pavilions. Here Mullett emphasized the pavilions by projecting them one bay beyond the hyphens and separating the bays with pilasters which support an entablature complete with metopes and triglyphs in the frieze. The bays of the hyphens, on the other hand, are not separated by pilasters, and the frieze above them does not contain triglyphs and metopes. The corner pavilions are further emphasized with slightly raking parapets. These serve to relate the pavilions to the pedimented central portico. As an indication of the immense size of the building, the entablature which surrounds it is seven feet two inches high.

The side elevations, facing Mission and Jessie Streets, depend entirely on the corner pavilions for their definition and interest. Here again the pavilions are emphasized by their projections, pilasters supporting a full entablature, and raking parapets. The side elevations are three rather than five part compositions, and the central elements on each side consist of eight bays.



*Longitudinal section through courtyard showing east-iron chimney tops. Original working drawing. (National Archives)*







*View of the rear of the Mint showing the two brick chimneys with their decorative cast-iron tops removed. (Photo by Robert W. Kerrigan, 1936)*

The rear or Mint Street facade, except for the omission of the portico, is quite similar to the Mission Street facade. The central element is crowned with a pediment which, in this case, does not cover a free standing portico but is an integral part of the building itself. Its five bays are defined by pilasters. On this facade, unlike the other three, the corner pavilions project beyond the building face by only the depth of the pilasters rather than by the width of a complete bay.

Visible above the Mint Street facade are the only external hints of the functional use of the building, the twin brick chimneys, originally 130 feet high. These funneled the acid chemical fumes from the retorts during the ore refining process. The 20 feet high, elaborately executed, cast-iron chimney tops were removed some time prior to 1927.

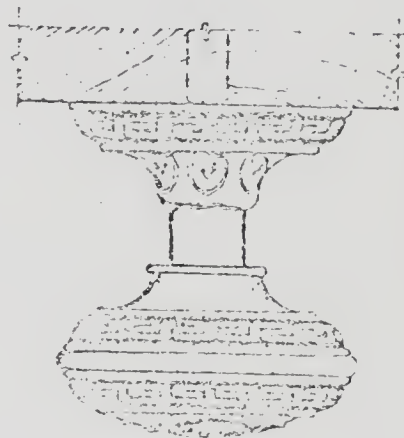






## Interior

The interior of the Old Mint shows the same masterful use of ornamental detail, careful sense of classic proportion, and selection of materials noted on the exterior. The main entrance door, though decorated with what appears to be wooden panels, is of cast iron with stamped sheet metal moldings. In fact, all internal trim, moldings, cornices, and stairs are of cast iron. Windows throughout the building are equipped with iron shutters which fold flat against the iron reveals. Counting rooms and offices are trimmed with golden mahogany and contain mantels of the "best quality veined Italian marble." Interior doors, with the exception of the vault doors, are also of golden mahogany and are embellished with elaborate hinges, escutcheons, and door-knobs, the last of which bear the seal of the Treasury Department.



DOOR KNOB DETAILS

The two most impressive interior spaces are the Office of the Mint and the Office of the Assistant Treasurer, both two-story high companion rooms near the front entrance. From floor to ceiling they measure approximately 35 feet. Each is surrounded by a narrow cast-iron gallery at the second floor level. The bays of the first floor are divided by coupled pilasters which help support the balcony; the second story bays have no pilasters. An elaborate cornice finishes the wall elevation in both rooms.

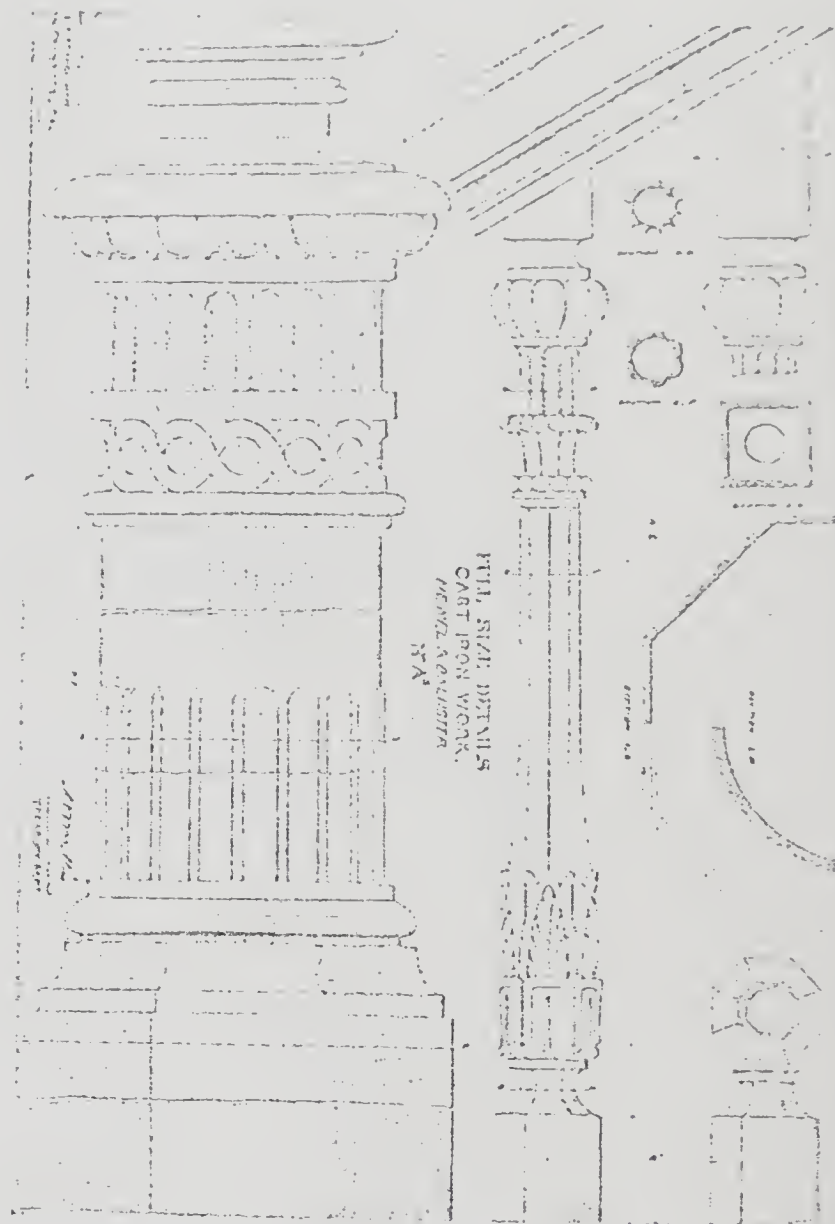


Other interior spaces were designed in a more practical and utilitarian vein. However, early photographs show that counters and furniture (Honduras mahogany), lighting fixtures, and even mechanical equipment were designed so as to give a sense of unity to the building.





Original working drawing of cast-iron  
column and baluster (National Archives)



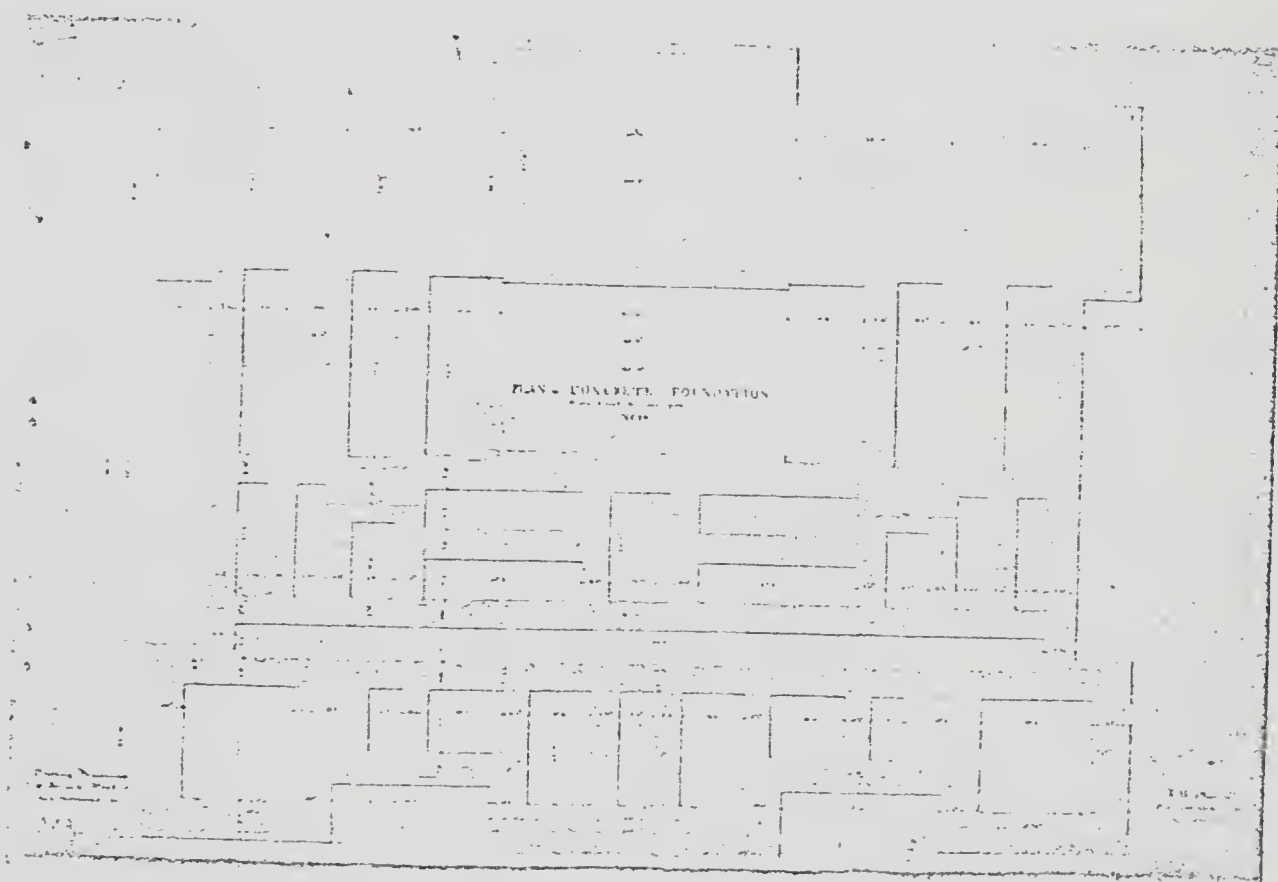
Even the massive engine which drove the  
machinery of the Mint was an example of  
fine design. (Photo by Runnels and  
Stateler, c. 1885, Collection of Bernard  
Kollerhauser).





## Construction

While the design of the building and its place in the history and development of American architecture are two of its most impressive features, the construction of the Mint is equally significant. The building exhibits an inordinate degree of strength and solidity. There are two reasons for this: first, it was designed not only for the refining of ore, but for the storage of coinage, and second, by 1869, the propensity of earthquakes in the San Francisco area was well known.



*Original working drawing of concrete foundations  
(National Archives)*

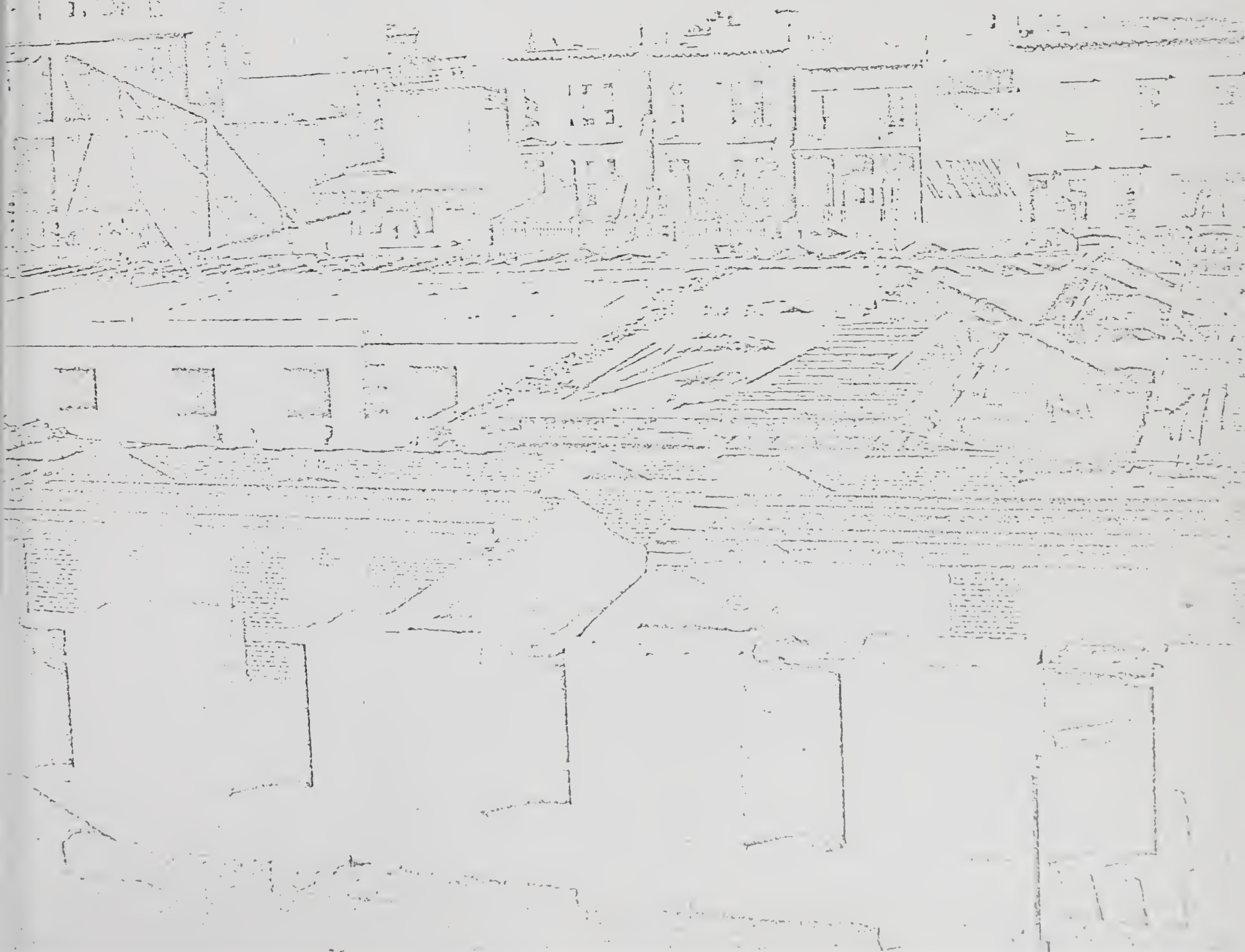
The building rests on concrete foundations which are five feet thick, while the exterior walls consist of three feet of steel-reinforced brick faced with an additional foot of stone. Interior partitions are, for the most part, of solid masonry construction well strengthened with steel mesh. Cast-iron pillars with 12 inch wrought iron girders aid the partition walls in the support of ceilings of arched brick parallel vaults between iron I-beams. The construction of the vaults is quite naturally the most massive of all. The walls



of the vaults are interlaced with iron railroad rails. When it was thought that a new mirt building might be erected on the site during the 1930's, one proposal was to demolish the entire structure, except for the vaults, and construct the new edifice around them.

The chimneys might appear to be the most fragile elements of the building, but they are as well built as other portions of the structure. Though faced with brick, they are held together by iron frames. Even their cast-iron tops survived the 1906 earthquake intact.

*This construction photo of 1870 clearly shows the massive brick and stone walls and the iron beams which support the floors. (Photo by Muybridge, from the Gleason Collection, San Francisco College for Women)*







RECENT HISTORY and PRESERVATION INVOLVEMENT  
1938 - 1969

The Old San Francisco Mint has acquired a most impressive array of supporters during the last several decades. Some preservation interest was generated as early as 1938 when the initial determination to abandon the Mint was made by the Treasury Department, but the assigning of other Federal agencies to the building insured its continued use for a while longer. It was not until 1956, with the announcement of the pending disposal of the building by the General Services Administration, that preservation efforts began in earnest. Since then the history of the Mint has been an alternate succession of schemes for demolition and plans for preservation, with delays in enacting either. Ironically, financial considerations seem to have been as much a deterrent in preventing the Mint's demolition as in halting plans for its possible future use.

The National Park Service's initial efforts to save the building, which resulted in the declaration on December 6, 1956, that it possessed national historical significance, were strengthened by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Society of California Pioneers. In August 1956, the National Trust declared its support for the Mint's preservation, and in October 1956, the California Pioneers endorsed the National Park Service's efforts. After plans were announced for construction of a new Federal building, the National Park Service was given partial use of the Mint, and plans were formulated to preserve it under National Park Service administration for use as a planning office and museum laboratory. Estimates made in 1957 for converting the building to these uses totaled \$698,728.

On the obverse side, it was during this time that the City of San Francisco expressed its most stringent opposition to preservation efforts, realizing that the property, if returned to private hands, could produce \$300,000 annually in taxes. In February 1958, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors petitioned Congress to disapprove any budget requests for the Mint and suggested that the General Services Administration dispose of the building by sale to private developers.





Preservationists responded to this development early in the spring of 1958 at a meeting held in San Francisco when representatives of several organizations spoke in favor of saving the Mint. Among the groups included were the American Institute of Architects, the American Institute of Archeology, the California Historical Society, the Society of Architectural Historians, the Sierra Club, the Alpine Club, and the Society of California Pioneers.

Also supporting the movement for preservation of the Mint at this time was its "across the street neighbor," the San Francisco Chronicle. On October 20, 1958, the National Trust expressed appreciation to the paper for its editorial position.

On February 18, 1959, a public hearing, set by the Secretary of the Interior, was held in San Francisco to determine the extent of public interest in the proposal to establish the Old Mint as a National Historic Site under administration of the National Park Service. Approximately 95 persons attended the meeting. Letters endorsing the project also came from such individuals and preservation groups throughout the country as the Society of Architectural Historians (enclosing a resolution of January 29, 1959), the Preservation Society of Providence, Rhode Island, and the Daughters of California Pioneers.

In January and February of 1959 the National Trust passed a resolution urging Trust members to campaign actively for the Old Mint and sent letters to all California Trust members, all member organizations, and select National organizations urging support.

In opposition to the proposed use of the building by the Park Service as a National Historic Site, planning office, and museum laboratory, repeated budget requests in the years 1959-1961 were refused by Congress. In June 1959 new estimates were obtained for repairs and alterations which would be necessary for National Park Service occupancy. Total interior work was estimated at \$952,080. Exterior work was divided into two schemes: Scheme A called for complete exterior restoration, necessitating an outlay of \$275,280; Scheme B called for repairs rather than restoration and replacement and would have cost \$178,364. These plans were thwarted when the 86th Congress reduced Park Service appropriations for preservation of the Mint by \$700,000. This rebuttal led to a shift in emphasis to a possible cooperative agreement between the Park Service and some appropriate public agency for operation and maintenance of the building.



In June 1966 the National Convention of the American Institute of Architects strengthened its earlier position calling for preservation of the Mint by adapting a resolution urging "appropriate agencies and organizations to take definite steps to restore and preserve" the Mint and by requesting the Mayor and Board of Supervisors of the city "to join in support of such action." The same month saw a resolution passed by the Conference of California Historical Societies urging preservation.

On August 12, 1966 the General Services Administration announced that the Old Mint was surplus property and, according to law, declared a 30 day period during which other Federal agencies were given an opportunity to indicate an interest in it. The Department of the Interior requested and received extensions until January 11, 1967, in hope of working out some means of preservation and management. Estimates of rehabilitation and restoration were made once again, and the discouraging sum of \$1,938,000 was announced. Although the City of San Francisco and the California Historical Society had indicated interest in the building, neither had made commitments by the January deadline. Just prior to the deadline, Congressman Burton of California introduced a bill to declare the Old Mint a national monument. This bill, introduced on January 10, 1967, was not passed.

On February 22, 1967 the General Services Administration notified the National Park Service that the Old Mint had been removed from the excess property list. This action was then followed by a change in policy of the San Francisco city government. Declaring, in the spring of 1968, that the Mint "must be saved," Mayor Joseph Alioto appointed a three man commission to study possible uses. The commission developed a broad program for the building as a "Junior City Hall" housing welfare and human relations offices. Also promoting the city's renewed interest was the San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board of the City Planning Commission, which passed a resolution on February 28, 1968 calling for preservation. As in the past, however, the hard realities of financial involvement prevented the city from implementing these plans. The city's latest position was expressed on March 20, 1969 by Mayor Alioto who withdrew official participation in future plans.



In April 1960 the American Institute of Architects, at its National Convention, passed a resolution in favor of the preservation and adaptive use of the Old Mint.

Preservation efforts were strengthened on July 3, 1961, when the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments declared the Old Mint eligible for designation as a National Historic Landmark. Also in 1961, as if to emphasize the need for urgent action on the building, a 150 pound piece of the cornice fell, landing just inside the front lawn fence at the intersection of Fifth and Mission Streets. In October 1964, a two foot section of cornice broke off and landed on a parked car. This led to an inspection of the exterior decorative work, and in the interest of safety, the cornice was subsequently removed.



*This view shows the Old Mint as it appears today with most of its cornice removed.  
(Photo by Henry B. Droms, 1960)*







More resolutions were passed in 1962 favoring the Mint's preservation, such as those put forth by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (October 1962), the California Heritage Council (October 1962), and the California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (December 1962).

In March of 1963 the San Francisco Planning Committee, composed of representatives of neighborhood groups throughout the city, added its voice to the chorus of preservationists. In April Golden Gate College, which wished to retain the building and use it for classrooms, asked the National Trust to support this plan, although the building has not yet been declared surplus property. As a result of the increased public interest, the Old Mint was opened to visitors on June 30, 1963, and over 10,000 people inspected the building.

Preservationist wrath in 1965 and 1966 centered around the disfigurement of the building caused by the removal of the cornice. Although the General Services Administration did this as a safety precaution and planned eventually to replace the cornice, resolutions protesting the removal were passed by the California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments.

In the spring of 1969, Golden Gate College again showed interest in the Old Mint and commissioned an architectural firm to make estimates for the building's conversion to a law school. Although the college felt it could afford the interior renovations necessary for classroom usage, the cost of properly restoring the exterior in a manner which would maintain its original architectural integrity was a greater financial burden than the college could assume.

With no one willing to take on the Old Mint, the General Services Administration, in June 1969, transferred the building to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. On June 13, 1969, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation was notified by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare that it proposed to convey the building to the State of California for the use of San Francisco State College, under authority of Section 203(k) of Public Law 81-152, as amended. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare acknowledged the fact that the state plans to demolish the building and replace it with a modern structure. Proposed transfer of the property was to be on or about June 24, 1969. Prior to



this, on June 10, 1969, Congressman Burton introduced a new bill (H.R. 12513) to have the structure declared a national monument.

The most recent preservation action occurred on July 10, 1969. This was a reaffirmation on the part of the North California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects reiterating earlier stands and urging the preservation of the Old Mint.

The June 13th letter from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to the Advisory Council was answered by informing the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare that the Council must be given an opportunity to comment on the proposed action. Consequently, the date for the conveyance of the property was suspended in order that the Advisory Council might offer its comments at its August 6-7 meeting.

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## FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Several suggestions for possible adaptive uses of the building have been mentioned in conjunction with various agencies who, at one time or another, have expressed interest in the Old Mint. In summary they are:

1. A National Historic Site administered by the National Park Service. This would have combined a living museum, illustrating the minting process, with offices and laboratories of the Park Service. (Monies were not allocated by Congress for such use)
2. An adjunct to the City Hall. This imaginative plan, which conceived of the building as a "Junior City Hall" envisioned the transfer of many of the city welfare offices to the Old Mint. (This proposal also suffered from the lack of available money.)
3. Golden Gate College desired the building for its law school with minimum interior renovations and a complete exterior restoration. (Once more, cost estimates, especially for the exterior, discouraged the project)

Reasons in favor of demolition of the building are:

1. Return of the site to a private developer with the aim of restoring the property to the tax rolls. The City of San Francisco, at one time the main proponent of this plan, has made no objection to the site being occupied by San Francisco State College which would not be a tax-paying institution.
2. Use of the site for a multi-story parking garage. This was not accomplished because demolition costs, estimated at \$400,000 approximately five years ago, were too high in comparison with anticipated returns, and also the space, approximately 210 feet square, was not considered adequate. (A larger parking facility has since been erected by the Parking Authority nearby.)





3. San Francisco State College. The present threat to the building is posed by this institution, which desires the demolition of the Old Mint in order to use the site for the construction of a downtown educational center. The college maintains that its needs are too extensive to be housed adequately in the Old Mint.



## CONCLUSION

Preservationists would agree that their two main objectives are to retain the Old Mint and to effect a complete and authentic exterior restoration. Beyond these, there are two valid approaches to the future use of the building. The most appropriate usage, in purist terms, i.e., one that would be consistent with its original design and function, would be as a mint museum. This is a field of interest not presently covered in the National Park Service program. Much of the original equipment is still in existence and could be restored to working order. As some facets of the minting process would perhaps not be of general interest, and as many areas within the building were originally office and storage space, the structure could serve both as a museum illustrating the minting process and house Park Service offices. This use of the building should be explored further.

The other equally valid program for the building would be an adaptive, viable use in the community. This is illustrated by the proposals of Golden Gate College and the City of San Francisco. While the city has officially withdrawn its interest in the building, further approaches might well be made to Golden Gate College. The successful adaptation of the Springfield Armory in Massachusetts to educational uses could serve as a precedent in a study of this possibility.

San Francisco State College proposes to use the site but not the Old Mint building. Present planning calls for a new building of about 180,000 square feet (gross). (The San Francisco State College has given the figure of 116,785 square feet as the gross floor area of the Old Mint.) This implies a structure of approximately five stories. Construction shall allow that additions, if needed, would be structurally feasible. While inadequate for the total needs of the college, there is enough usable floor space in the Old Mint to fulfill many of its requirements. As the two main floors are each 18 feet high, it may well be possible for intermediate floors to be installed in selected locations to provide more usable floor space. It may also be feasible to



use the Old Mint in conjunction with a nearby structure or a nearby site on which another building could be erected for the college's downtown campus. As the site is within an area where many buildings are outmoded or substandard, studies in this direction are strongly urged.

The Old San Francisco Mint has served the public well during its first hundred years, and there is no reason to believe it cannot serve equally well for the next hundred years. Three days prior to its dedication in 1874, a San Franciscan newspaperman noted that unless an earthquake should give it "a subterranean quietus," the structure would "stand firm for centuries." As has been shown, earthquakes do not seem to have an "adverse effect" on the Old Mint.

As its centenary rapidly approaches, it is to be hoped that sufficient thought and study will be given to prove this 1874 prediction correct and to insure the preservation and viable usage of this National Historic Landmark.

